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ABSTRACT

Asset mapping--drawing a map of what is valuable in a community--is an exercise in community development. A process for determining assets in the individual and in the community is provided in this workbook. It begins by asking the reader to perform a self-assessment to determine personal assets. Knowledge of each asset enhances self-awareness, and we learn about something by investigating the components that compose it. The text then explores ways to map one's community, to identify the needs, strengths, and powerful and positive people who make up the community. It is important to solicit many different views on the strengths of the community, and one way to do this is to develop a questionnaire for residents. The questions should reflect the goals of the community. Once the assets are listed, a pool of resources, skills, and knowledge can be defined. Next, the assets of institutions, such as schools and the children they educate, may be listed. By learning how to ask what communities have to offer, a process of building, creating, and developing can be put into motion, and new ideas for community building can be gained. (RJM)

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Strengthening Community Education:
The Basis for Sustainable Renewal

MAPPING COMMUNITY ASSETS WORKBOOK

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Mapping Community Assets Workbook

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INTRODUCTION

Asset: An item of value owned; a quality, condition, or entity that serves as an advantage, support, resource, or source of strength

Mapping: To make a map of; to show or establish the features or details of, with clarity like that of a map; to make a survey of, or travel over for, as if for the purpose of making a map

Asset mapping, drawing a map of what is valuable in our communities, is an exercise in community development. If you are looking for a way to begin work towards organizing local people to take an active role in the place where they live, it is a good idea to start with what you know. If you don't know the place where you live, how will you know how to take advantage of all there is to offer? How will you know how to build a strong, active community without the foundation of assets that are already right there?

This workbook asks us to sit down and think about who and where we are as a first step in getting to where we want to go. What is this community we want to develop? Is it its geographic dimensions? Its history? Its demography? Is it the town council that runs it? The "crime problem?" The unemployment rate? These may all be attributes of a place, but they are also just perspectives. Perspectives can be diverse, and each one changes the nature of what it is you are observing. From a community development perspective, it helps to think of our communities in terms of the wealth in people, things, services, and resources that exist there. And that is what our work here is: to try to understand how to approach what we do from a positive, creative, productive perspective—a perspective that builds from strengths, resources, and assets.

Asset mapping reveals and explores those resources and assets. More importantly, it shows all the interconnections among assets; these interconnections reveal ways to access the assets. How you get to the assets and use them, and the people involved in the getting and using, all these are also assets. Assets—the relations among them and access to use them—these are the grounds on which communities are built.

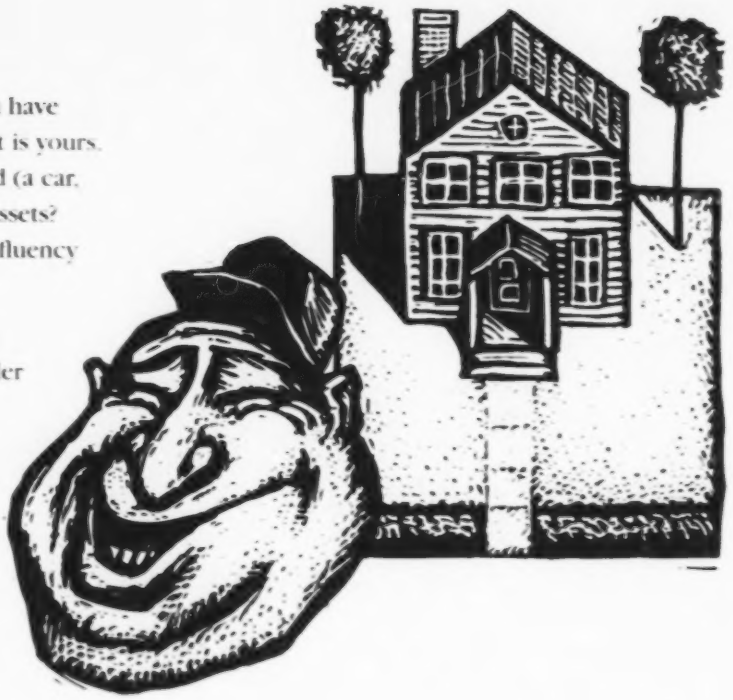
Starting From the Top: My Stuff

What do we consider assets? Put yourself in the center and begin a personal asset map. Around you, write down your assets.

You have begun a personal asset map. You have put down what you consider valuable that is yours. Is everything on your map a material good (a car, house, bank account)? Are these all your assets? Does a beautiful smile count? How about fluency in three languages?

Go back and fill in any nonmaterial thing you did not include that you might consider an asset.

Assets are more than cars and houses, or even a great pitching arm. How has your life been affected by people? How did you get the stuff? Did you borrow money for a car? From a bank? From family or friends? How are people and their relationship to you assets?



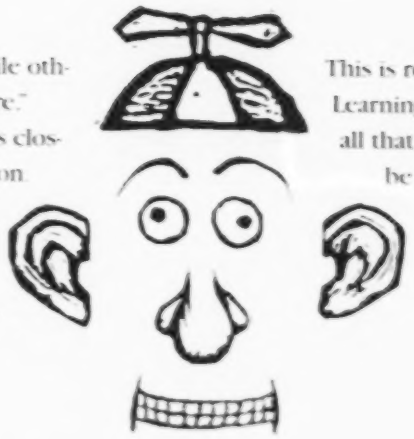
As your map grows, we begin to see that assets are both things (material objects) and people (relationships with others and others' involvement in your connection to things). People and things surround us, make up the whole of our world.

Trade your map with a neighbor (preferably someone you do not know well). With just a glance or two at this person's map, what do you learn about him or her?

What kinds of things does this map of people and things NOT tell us about this person?

Perhaps a more detailed map would help us know more. What kinds of things would need to be included so that we could know this person really well just by reading his or her map?

Some things seem to define us, while others tell less about "who we really are." But each item on the map brings us closer to knowledge of the whole person. Breaking ourselves down item by item, person by person, helps us build an encompassing picture of the whole; it helps us learn who or what that whole is.



This is really what asset mapping is about. Learning about something by finding out all that comprises it. This knowledge can be one of the most important components in community work. How would you begin an asset map of a place?

What would the things you previously listed tell you about the place you are mapping?

Below we will begin the process of learning about our communities by mapping them.

Mapping a Community

When you think of your community, do you see a geographic map in your mind? Or perhaps you see a retail and residential map that tells you what's available and where people live.

We know a lot of things about our communities, but there is often much we never know about because we do not know how or what to ask about them.

What do we know about the places in which we live? Maybe one thing we know is that somehow we want to develop, renew, or revitalize the place. If you are interested in strengthening your community, you must have some sense of it. Why do you believe it should be developed, or that anything should be done with it?

NOT NEEDS BUT ASSETS

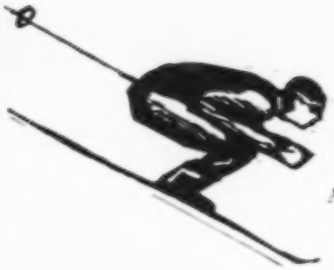
Does your list above focus on what your community needs and how to make up for what it lacks? It is common in community development work to begin by assessing needs.

This approach to knowing communities basically maps deficiencies. It seems logical that it will be a lot harder to build or develop your community from nothing (what it does not have) than from something (its assets).

To build from what you do have requires asking different kinds of questions to learn different kinds of things about where we live. We can create a map of our community that tells us what and where its assets are: the positive, powerful people and things that contribute ideas, resources, and capacities. This is the focus and goal of asset mapping.

Communities can only be built by focusing on the strengths and capacities of the citizens who call that community home. Those who have escaped the lures of deficiency, therefore, have been drawing up a new map based on old truths, an "Assets Map"... At the center of the map, and of the community building process, lie the "gifts" of individual residents, their knowledge, skills, resources, values, and commitments.

(John Kretzman,1997).



First we must learn to know our places. Where do we start? Is there any one thing that instantly springs to mind when the name of your community is uttered? Skiing? Wheat? An annual festival? Can you map your community with whatever is special in the center? Who and what comprise or are connected to this special center?

You have now begun to map your community as a collection of assets, as a positive, useful resource. At the center is a main event, feature, or product. From here radiate, perhaps, the wheat farmers, their market, their suppliers, and their connections to each other.

This is the beginning of learning about our communities as places FULL of positive, useful resources. What other resources could you list that did not appear on the map?

We can return to our personal maps and recall that we distinguished there between things as assets and people as assets. Did you include any of those assets in your community map? How many people have you listed on your community map? Are there two or three? Go back to a couple of the people, list them below, and write briefly about your relationship with them.

Person	Relationship

People are important on these maps in several ways. We can think of them as resources, relationships, and mappers. Let's start with the last term: mappers. If a community is more than the sum of its parts, it is also not any one of those parts alone. So it would be hard, if not impossible, for a single member of that community to create its asset maps. People working together—drawing on multitudes of relationships, experiences, resources, and skills—make richer, wider ranging, more illustrative maps.

Therefore, it is best to work in partnership with others to create these maps.

Now, let's continue to think about people. How are people resources (owners of goods, knowledge, and skills)? Return to the people you listed and think about them in terms of resources. What do you come up with?

Person	Resource

Where did you start? Did you think of these people in terms of stuff they own (material things) or knowledge, skills, and abilities they have to offer?

Or did you include both kinds of things? If you started with material goods, now list their knowledge, skills, and abilities (or vice versa).

Person	Resource

We may be able to do this for a few people that we know, but how do we learn about members of our communities we haven't met? To elicit information on community assets in order to draw our maps, a first step could be to develop a questionnaire that may be sent out to a broad range of community residents or used in interviews. The questions should reflect the goals of your own community's work. John Kretzman and John McKnight have written a book on how to learn about a community's assets. According to them, a typical questionnaire might cover:

- Skills information, including skills people have learned at home, in the community, or at the workplace. Usually people are asked to identify their "priority skills," those about which they are most confident.
- Community skills information, aimed at uncovering precious community experience and potential interests.
- Enterprising interests and experience, aimed at uncovering past and present business experience, culture, and arts skills.
- Minimum personal information, for follow-up purposes (Kretzman, 1997).

Using a questionnaire is also a great way to get to know and begin to develop relationships with people. You may find that the quiet man who is known only as a heavy drinker is a carpenter; a math teacher is a cellist.

Briefly put together a questionnaire with about six to 10 questions that cover the information listed above. Questions might touch on whether a person has cared for children or aging parents; what kinds of repairs or improvements they have done on their homes; whether they make their own gifts, give a lot of parties, or work/play on computers. How would you answer your questions?

Your Questionnaire

1 Question: .....
Answer: .....
.....

2 Question: .....
Answer: .....
.....

3 Question: .....
Answer: .....
.....

4 Question: .....
Answer: .....
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5 Question: .....
Answer: .....
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6 Question: .....
Answer: .....
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7 Question: .....
Answer: .....
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8 Question: .....
Answer: .....
.....

9 Question: .....
Answer: .....
.....

10 Question: .....
Answer: .....
.....

How did you do? Now look at the answers of a partner or member of your group. You two can already begin to build a pool of resources, skills, and knowledge. What, though, do we do with this pool? How do we begin to put it to use?

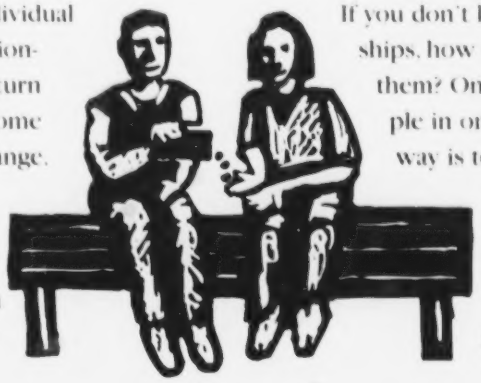
One thing we could do is see how our skills, resources, and knowledge complement each other. Maybe you are a potter and your neighbor an excellent accountant: a business is in the making.

Now, think about where or how you could offer your resource pool to the community. Skills are not skills unless they go to work, and unless they are accessible, they can't work. This is where you can go back to thinking about services that are currently going unrendered, or things that are wanted but not yet realized for those who want them. For instance, if Main Street is boarded and ghostly, a pottery shop would be a vital contribution.

Matching assets to needs can also be achieved in another way. Taking the collection of skills and knowledge you and your partner or group amassed, you can set up a skills bank and begin an exchange: people who need your expertise can ask for it; then they offer whatever they have to the bank and it can be drawn at any time by anyone. Use a blank piece of paper as a ledger of accounts and begin to make some deposits and withdrawals on your skills bank.

Relationships

With every exchange you as an individual make, you become a part of a relationship. You give to someone who in turn gives to another, and you receive some wisdom, service, or object in exchange. These exchanges begin to set up networks. Once the service has been rendered or the knowledge shared, the relationship can remain in place. Your link to other people can provide a strong foundation for continued building of assets and community. Relationships provide access to assets, another reason why they are assets themselves.



Once you have begun to learn of all the things people have to offer, you can begin also to see how people are connected and what value lies in those connections. People can be connected through their assets (you are in a network with the woman who brokered your house sale), but connections themselves are an asset (and she helped your sister find a house when she moved to your town).

Write down a recent project you worked on in your home, job, or community (such as buying a home, organizing little league, chairing the PTA bake sale, etc.). Then write in all the people you worked with in this project.

Project: .....

People: .....

.....

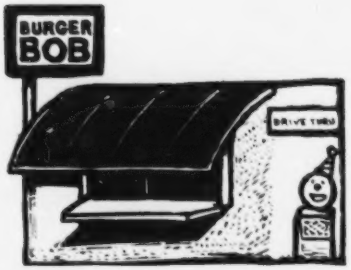
.....

Now return to each name and see if the people to whom you are connected are connected to one another. What is the nature of that connection? Do you even know of its existence? If one of your coworkers coaches the softball team of your librarian's daughter, important links to resources and institutions can be traced through these relationships.

If you don't know about these relationships, how could you find out about them? One way is to have more people in on your mapping. Another way is to alter your questionnaire so it elicits information on relationships. Yet another way is to find people through places: buildings, groups, or institutions.

Institutions

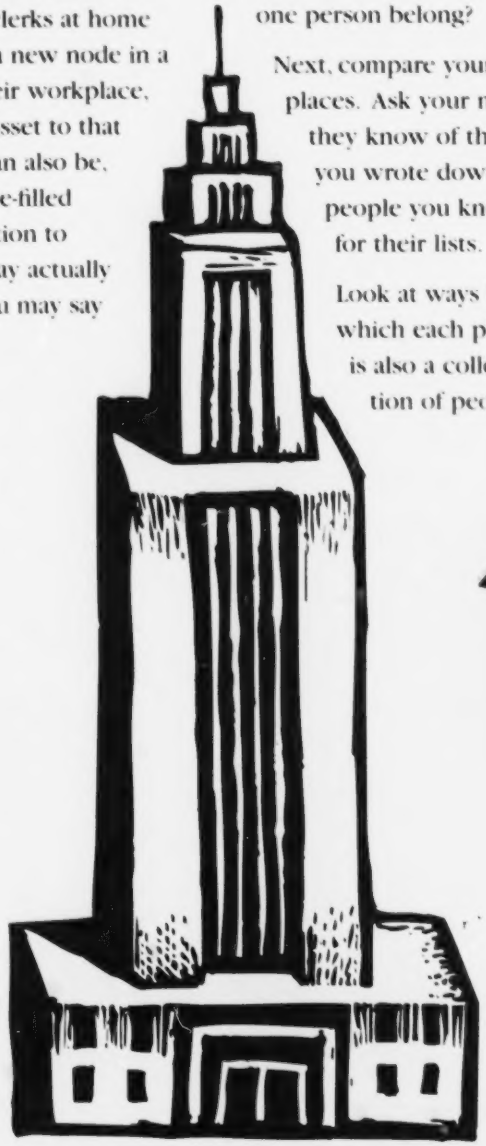
As you wrote in the names on the previous page, did the people come "on their own" or were they part of some organization, enterprise, or institution? You may have added on to your house. Friends offered advice, but so did clerks at home improvement stores. Each clerk is a new node in a network, and they are linked to their workplace, which may also be counted as an asset to that network. Connections to people can also be, or become, connections to resource-filled institutions. Likewise, your connection to some organization or institution may actually conceal a personal relationship. You may say your house loan came through "X" agency, but in fact you worked with a particular person there. He or she is another relationship, both to the person and the agency.



Let's begin to broaden our maps by including institutions, organizations, and enterprises. First, on the following page, list those that you are currently connected to (any office, club, league, enterprise and so forth you are connected to). Then compare your map with your neighbors'. Build a comprehensive list of local organizations and institutions, and look for overlap. To what institutions do more than one person belong?

Next, compare your "people knowledge" of places. Ask your neighbors to list any people they know of that belong to an institution you wrote down. See how many of those people you know yourself. Do the same for their lists.

Look at ways in which each place is also a collection of people.



What else are places good for? What other assets do they hold? A church may have meeting rooms that could hold meetings or classes; kitchen facilities for bake sales, meeting refreshments, or community picnics; or blackboards, offices, and telephones. It is connected to other churches and so congregations of like or different denominations. It may even have a newsletter. List three institutions from your pooled list and write down all the resources you can think of contained within it.

1

2

3

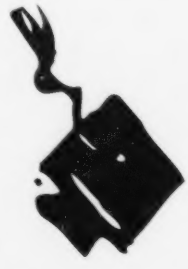
Did You Happen to Mention the SCHOOL?

One institution that is found in almost every community—one that holds valuable resources, knowledge, and assets—is one that is often overlooked.

The school is important, not just because it is a building bursting with possibilities. List a few if you haven't already:

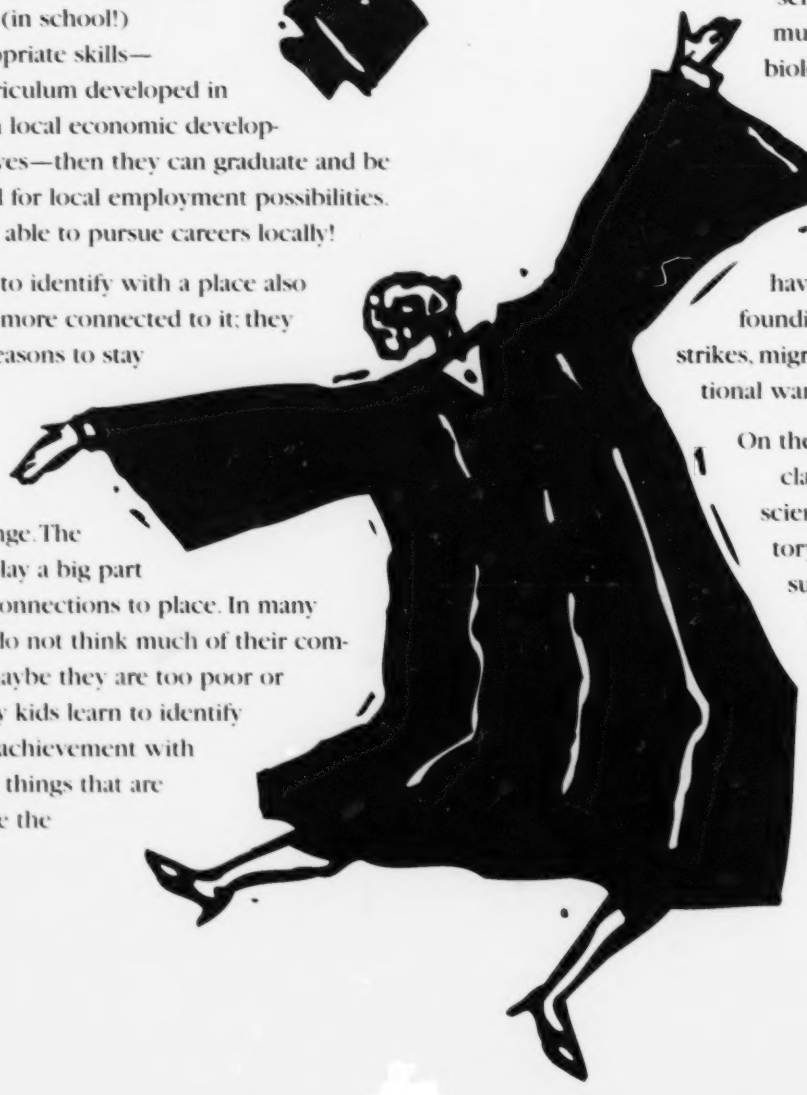
Now list some handy materials found in schools:

The school may be the most important institution you can count on for the simple reason that young people are there. If a community is to be a community, it has to have identity, economic vitality, and sustainability (among other things). The next generation's participation and support go a long way towards insuring sustainability. But many kids leave their communities for college or work. How can we make it possible for them to stay in or to return to their home towns after advanced schooling or training? If they learn (in school!) locally appropriate skills—through curriculum developed in concert with local economic development initiatives—then they can graduate and be ideally suited for local employment possibilities. They will be able to pursue careers locally!



Getting kids to identify with a place also makes them more connected to it; they have more reasons to stay there, and this too helps achieve sustainable change. The school can play a big part in building connections to place. In many places, kids do not think much of their communities—maybe they are too poor or remote. Many kids learn to identify success and achievement with qualities and things that are found outside the places they live. Rural youth may learn from TV and print ads that urban lifestyles or what can be acquired in malls define all that is good and desirable. For it is not enough for folks to learn about the positive things in their own places; they must see the value in those things as well.

School and community-based learning curriculums go a long way towards getting kids to know about the places in which they live, and to see the value of that place. Moreover, by participating in community projects, they see important places for themselves within their communities. They can learn biology and about the local pond. History class can involve interviews with local senior citizens who may have participated in the founding of the town, labor strikes, migrations, or an international war.



On the next page, design classes for any subject—science, math, English, history, or combinations of subjects—that gets students out into their community. It's not easy. Where would you begin? Who or what would need to be involved?

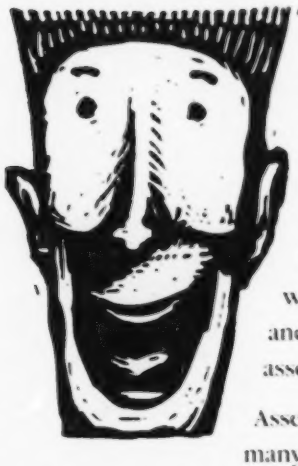
Community as Curriculum

Below, list people and institutions that are involved in the project you created.

Did you think about a project for which the resources (people or places) were not readily available? What was lacking? Was it really lacking, or perhaps just overlooked? Would an asset map of particular skills, business opportunities, or people be able to help ferret out the resources you'd need? An asset map could also show how you might modify the project so that (1) it didn't rely on locally unavailable resources, or (2) it created a way to develop the resources that are currently lacking. Students could be a part of developing resources as they learn about their hometowns, what's there, and what they have to offer.

Conclusion

Learning how to ask what communities have to offer begins a process of building, creating, and developing. It brings resources, knowledge, skills, capacities, and people together. Through these connections, access to more resources and assets is at our fingertips. As we build relationships with people, agencies, institutions, or businesses, we increase our connections and access to a multitude of assets.



Asset mapping can be a tool at many stages of community building processes, and involve many different participants. How would a map made by co-workers look? What different kinds of things could a students' map have to offer? What would happen if the students read the workers map and vice versa? What could they learn about their community and about each other?

Try mapping with different groups. See what happens when students, workers, administrators, police, and business people build a map together.

Once the assets are identified and you learn how to access and use them, a variety of new ideas about directions for community building may follow. As more people come into the process and bring ideas as well as skills and resources, new approaches to old issues will come into the process as well.

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